

Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time B
Deut 18:15-20; 1 Cor 7:32-35; Mk 1:21-28
January 28, 2024

When nature shows its real power through snow, ice, and wind, we realize how powerless we can be. The elemental, the basic power of nature can easily disable our technology, disrupt the schedules and systems we create, and throw everything into chaos. Most of us like to think that we are in control, but before certain forces, like those of nature, we aren't. That can give us a glimpse into the heart and mind of the man possessed by a demon who came to Jesus in today's Gospel passage. We can only imagine what his life must have been like, to have this demon within him, ruling his life, destroying everything he held dear. Maybe he tried to fight it off, but to no avail (benefit). Each morning he probably thought, this day will be different, but it wasn't. The demon's power was too great for him. It controlled him and his actions.

Then, one day he came to the synagogue, and he met the power of Jesus, the power of God. This man did not need ideas, but the grace and power of God to set him free. Jesus looked at the man and addressing the demon said, ***"Quiet! Come out of him."*** And he was set free.

There are forces and demons in our life, forces of evil outside of us, and forces of evil inside of us that can control our life.

Sometimes we think that if we just have the right ideas, if we read a little bit more and get more information, then we can somehow think ourselves into spiritual freedom, when what we really need is the power and grace of God.

There is the story of Sigmund Freud, the Father of Psychiatry and an explorer of the unconscious.

He tried to develop a method to free people from those dark desires and urges that control their conscious life.

Freud was a cigar smoker and he eventually died of throat cancer. Even with all his theoretical knowledge about the unconscious, and his knowledge that smoking was causing his cancer, he couldn't stop smoking. He had the knowledge, but not the will power.

There are demons that can take control of our life, demons such as hate, prejudice, greed, and lust. These are all powers that can destroy our life and rob us of the freedom, dignity, and purpose God has for us. And within them all, lurks the evil one. These demons, these forces, can be like a storm out of control and we seem to be at their mercy. Then comes that moment when the sun starts to shine. The storm is over, the wind stops howling and the snow that had paralyzed us, that held everything in check a few hours before, begins to melt.

That is comparable to the power of Jesus the Christ in our life. Just as the snow gives way to the strength of the sun, so those powers, hate, greed, prejudice, that seem to dominate our life can retreat before the power of the Risen Jesus. Jesus can do for each of us what he did for the man in the Gospel that afternoon in the synagogue. Jesus spoke with the authority of God, and the unclean spirit left the man.

Today, many people want freedom from the powers that dominate their life. Often, they turn to superstition, to psychics, charms, chain letters; things that we may have thought were from the past, but are still very much with us today. As Christians, we need to avoid superstitions, even those that are done in humor, because what starts in humor can become very serious.

Jesus freed the man possessed by the demon, just as he came to free us from all the forces of evil, the ones outside us and the ones inside us as well, so that we can live in the dignity and freedom of God's people.

We need to avoid anything that diminishes, (dilutes), divides, weakens, and fragments the most precious gift we have; our faith, our trust in Jesus the Christ. Whatever the forces we battle, we know the One stronger than those forces is among us.

There are many things around us that promise freedom and end up making us slaves or addicts. The power and authority of Jesus is the only power on earth that doesn't dominate us, but truly sets us free.

That Sabbath afternoon, in a synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus freed a man whose name we don't even know, from a demon that controlled his life.

That brings us hope.

Whatever the demons in our life, demons from the past, or demons in the present, what Jesus did for that man in the synagogue, he can do for us.

May we recognize among us the One who has the power to cast out our demons, the one who seeks to enter our hearts and lives; the One who wants to make us faithful and whole, Jesus the Christ.

- Fr. Stephen Lattner, O.S.B.